



A
DREAMSPINNER
PRESS

Day Dream

OFF THE PAGE

RYAN LOVELESS

SKIRMISHING winds battered the shutters against the manor house's windows and emitted an awful caterwaul, but in his room the dashing ne'er-do-well and rogue Lord John Loring stared at the single red rose that had been left on his bed. He lifted it with thumb and forefinger, his touch gentle for a man of his strength, history, and supposed character. He paused to reflect on this as he examined its petals with callused fingers. He did not expect, after murdering his enemies by the dozens, that he still had that quality in him that would allow him to caress a flower without doing it damage.

Christian stopped typing and reread what he'd written. He deleted 'dashing ne'er-do-well and rogue.' This was his third book featuring Lord John, so if the readers didn't know he was a handsome devil by now, he'd been doing something wrong.

"Might as well include his birth certificate and resume." He glanced around to make sure no one had heard him muttering to himself. The motion was done out of habit. His wife had packed up her suitcase and driven away a month before. She'd sent a letter, not an email, to give him the news. "It's not you," it said. "It's Lord Loring. How am I supposed to compete with him? When you're ready to be with someone real, let me know."

The sorry thing of it was, he couldn't tell Cindy she was wrong. Christian had created Loring using a mixture of all the traits he desired in a lover. He was stalwart, strong, and passionate; he had a good, if hidden, sense of humor. He never hesitated to jump into battle, be it on the field or in a pub, and he was loyal to the death to those he loved, just as he commanded loyalty in others. And yes, maybe Christian was a little in love with him, but he didn't see anything wrong with that. Wasn't an author supposed to love his characters?

In the first book, Loring had gone on a spree of revenge following the murder of his wife and child, riding his steed Razorback across the Cotswolds, sword in hand, hacking down the nobles responsible. In his second book, Loring was almost hanged for his activities in the first book, but at the last moment reprieve came in the form of a masked man. At the start of book three, Loring was at home brooding because Christian hadn't decided what adventure to send him on yet.

When he told his agent this, she'd rolled her eyes (not that he could see her, but the tone of her e-mail heavily implied it) and said, "Love is the greatest adventure of all."

What she meant was, "Get him laid."

But Loring deserved more than a quick tumble. Christian wanted to give Loring someone who would pursue him to slowly and painstakingly win him over. Christian needed a heroine.

He anticipated her background would involve a long and complicated lineage, a mislaid will, and a firm moral center that she would maintain even while sucking Loring's cock, or in the parlance of his genre, "tasting the sweet nectar of her stalwart lover's noble manhood." He called her Christina. It didn't occur to him until he wrote her first scene that he was self-inserting. However, once he reread it, the fact stood out like a flashing sign. He toyed with changing it, but something stopped him. It felt honest in a way his writing never had before. He wrote under a pseudonym, so it wouldn't be obvious to his readers. For his friends and family, though, there would be no question. When he thought about it that way, it looked like in addition to this being the book in which Loring finally got some, it would also be Christian's coming out. He was almost thirty years old. He figured it was about time.

"Fuck!" His new roommate's voice burst through the barricade of the door.

Christian jerked backward at the shout. Getting up, he sprinted downstairs to see John glaring at the stove and rubbing his hand.

"I thought you were still at work," Christian said. Hoping John hadn't heard him talking to himself, he hurried to the burners and turned them off.

"Got off early. It burned me," John said, using his abused finger to further incriminate the stove.

Christian headed for the sink. "Yeah, I'm sorry." He wondered if John was the type to sue. That would be his luck. "I should have warned you it's pretty touchy." He gave John a wet towel, which John wrapped around his hand. "Are you all right?"

John nodded, but he still looked perturbed. "I was trying to make coffee. We got a new flavor in at the shop today. Roasted hazelnut with a hint of raspberry. It sounds gross, but it tastes great."

Christian relaxed. No grudges. Good. “That sounds good. We do have a pot. You don’t need to boil anything.” Christian dug into the back of the cabinet until he found the old standard coffeemaker that had been shoved out of sight upon the espresso machine’s entrance. Cindy had taken that, too. Not that he could begrudge her that since it was *hers*, but he did think it was unfair that she got it *and* the dog.

“Well, now I feel stupid.” John slumped into a chair and propped his elbow on the table, looking morose.

“Don’t. You want me to get it?” Christian asked.

“I was going to bring you a cup so you didn’t have to stop writing, and now I’ve gone and interrupted you, and you probably won’t be able to get your concentration back and—”

“My concentration will be fine.” John’s rambling was endearing. It made Christian feel fond of him.

John raised his head from his hand and ventured a smile. “Seriously, Christian, go back upstairs. I’ll stop whining in a second and bring you a cup.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yeah.” John’s eyes looked wet, so Christian guessed he was putting on a brave front. The stove had burned Christian a few times too, and it hurt like hell.

“All right. Two sugars, no milk.”

“I know.” This time, there was a spark behind the smile. It made Christian smile right back.

“Thanks.” Turning to the door, Christian went back upstairs, his mind full of new thoughts. Maybe Christina could make breakfast for Loring but mess it up somehow. Burn herself on the cast iron stove and call upon Loring for help. He would tenderly wrap her wrist and then....

Loring’s fingers, rough-hewn from years hefting a sword and drawing back a bow, scratched across the fine skin of her inner wrists, sending a message to her ready loins that there was promise here, and she parted herself unconsciously, offering herself to him even though he could not see through the folds of her skirts that she was his for the taking.

He finished wrapping the gauze around her wrist. She could not restrain herself from breathing, heavy with desire, as he raised her petite hand to his unexpectedly soft lips and kissed her fingers. "Good as new, milady."

CHRISTIAN had advertised for a roommate after Cindy moved out because it was a big house and he had a mortgage. Plus, it made *noises*, and he didn't like being alone. But the ad didn't say, "Famous Author of Lord John Loring Series Seeks Roommate." It said, "Wanted: Roommate to share 3 BR ocean-side home with owner. Quiet types appreciated."

He got more responses than he'd expected, but none seemed right. And then John came along, looking exactly like Christian's imagined hero, every six-foot two-inch dashing bit of him. When he came close enough to shake hands, though, Christian saw that his dark hair was dyed. Judging from his light freckles, he was a natural strawberry blond. His nails were painted in black polish, which had started to chip. A bit of a Goth punk, Christian guessed. Not completely like Loring, then. But his handshake was firm and his smile—*holy shit*—Christian could melt right into that. They exchanged first names, and Christian showed him the available bedroom, which was on the first floor with an adjoining bathroom. John checked the taps, asked if he could redecorate, and upon receiving Christian's affirmative answer, pulled out a checkbook.

Christian made him show his ID the second he saw the name on the check. *John Loring*. The last thing he needed was to have *Misery* reenacted in his own home. John produced it, though, and rocked on his heels while Christian peered from the tiny picture of a light-haired, awkwardly smiling twenty-one year old man to the dark-haired confident twenty-six year old god standing in front of him. "This is actually you?" he asked, staring.

"Mom always said I was her little butterfly." John grinned and held his hand out for the ID. "So, since you got as far as carding me, does that mean I get the room?"

When Christian told him why he'd asked to see ID, John thought it was hilarious. "I'm a barista, and I sing in a band. Literary impersonation isn't really my thing."

"Just an amazing coincidence, I guess." Christian wondered if his continued staring made John uncomfortable, but he couldn't stop.

“Fuck coincidence. This is fate,” John said. He looked delighted.

Christian didn’t find out until after John moved in that he’d read the books and loved them, which made him a great roommate because he kept quiet as a result.

“If my being quiet means you write faster, that’s fine by me. You need to get that guy laid.”

“You’ve been talking to my agent,” Christian said, and John laughed.

CHRISTIAN stared at the folded pile of fluffy towels sitting on the bathroom shelf. He touched them as if to check their existence. They were *warm*.

“Oh yeah, I did the laundry,” John said, coming up behind him.

Turning, Christian’s eyes flicked down John’s bare chest as he realized that John had one of the towels wrapped around his waist. He wondered why John had decided to come upstairs after his shower instead of getting dressed in his room, which was right next to his bathroom. Stopping in to say he’d done the laundry didn’t seem enough of a reason. Christian snapped his gaze back up to John’s eyes. It *almost* looked like John was laughing at him.

“Uh, wow.” He hoped John would interpret his speechlessness as shock about the laundry being done and not as having anything to do with being inches away from John’s chest, which was still glistening wet. John’s distribution of water-darkened strawberry blond chest hair made a futile attempt to hide the freckles that washed across his skin.

John slipped past him into the bathroom. Opening the medicine cabinet, he took out the sunscreen. “Yeah, I thought after I fucked up dinner last night, I should do something.” He stepped back into the hall and stretched the arm that held the bottle over his head to rest it there, shifting his hip so the towel dropped a fraction of an inch.

Christian’s mouth went dry as a drop of water traveled from John’s armpit down his side to settle in the curve of his hip, pale skin stretched taut from John’s position. He sucked his lips into his mouth, trying to work up saliva so he could speak. “It’s not your fault. Who knew that french fries were so flammable when applied directly to fire?” Christian asked.

John's mouth quirked up into a half-smile. "Yeah, and clumsiness is inherited. I've been using that one my whole life." He dropped his arm. Christian watched with regret as the sliver of exposed hip disappeared beneath the fluffy yellow towel. "I'm off to the beach. You want to come?"

Christian glanced toward his office. He infused as much regret as he could into his response. "Deadlines."

John shrugged like *yeah, been there*. Even though, as far as Christian knew, he hadn't. "After you're done, we'll go out and celebrate. If you want, I mean."

"Oh, sure," Christian said, surprised. "Yes."

John smiled. Christian stared after him as he walked away. Broad shoulders stretched atop an expanse of back that looked like it carried the strength needed to swing a sword and cut down villains while his thighs squeezed around his galloping mount. Christian swallowed, mouth dry again. How would he feel if he could lave his tongue up the indented line running from the crevice of John's ass to the nape of his neck, to catch sweat and remnants of ocean water, to find an unfreckled spot and test its taste against its darker counterpart...? Christian shook his head and backed into the bathroom. Good time for a shower. Definitely.

LORING leaned against the kitchen's doorjamb, not bothering to hide his amused smile as Christina rushed around the table slapping down flames with the edge of a towel. Noticing him for the first time, she looked up in exasperation. "This never happened at home with the servants."

"Milady, I have never seen one set a meal on fire with such aplomb," he said, coming away from the door to catch her by the apron strings and tug her back into his arms. Holding her by the waist with one hand, he unhooked the tankard of water from the wall and flung it at the table.

"That was for the washing," she said mournfully and then, with more dejection, looked upon the table and added, "The duck is ruined."

He turned them together, placing her back against the wall. "I do not have duck in mind." He tasted her mouth, thrusting his tongue inside when she

opened for him. Her arms went around his neck. He crouched, caught her round the back of her smooth thighs, and lifted her up.

Christina threw her head back and moaned, locking her legs tighter around Loring. Her heels caught the waistband of his leather trousers and pushed down, seeking the firm, unyielding globes hidden beneath. He twisted his fingers inside her and she moaned again, rocking herself up, held only by her own legs and the death grip of her arms around his neck.

“Will you take my weapon, my lovely girl?” he growled against her throat.

“Yes, my lord. Please.” She could scarcely manage her words, but somehow the message came across. For next he was raising her higher. She felt the warm blunt head of his sword rubbing wetly at her opening as he gripped beneath her thighs with one hand and then slowly, slowly, lowered her down as she nipped into his shoulder, trembling, hearing his panting become louder with each moment of descent until at last he was sheathed inside her velvet scabbard.

Christian read the passage over. He'd done a point of view shift. He could fix it later. Or he could hope that his readers were too busy cheering the fact that Loring was finally getting his moment to notice.

“I brought you coffee,” John said. Christian looked up, startled. John always seemed to appear from nowhere. He should be used to it by now, having lived with him for nearly a month, but when Christian was in the writing zone, Cindy used to say she could set a house down next to him and he wouldn't see it unless it landed on him. A glance at his computer's clock told him that several hours had passed since John left for the beach. John set the mug on top of Cindy's letter, which had become a permanent coaster, and picked up the empty mug that was already on the desk. As John bent down, Christian caught the whiff of coconut lotion and salt water lingering on his skin and hair. He inhaled, savoring it for that second, but leaned backward as John stood again.

“It's vanilla blend. Or did you want more of the hazelnut? We're out, but I can go get some.” John trailed off, sounding worried.

“No, it's good,” Christian said. He said a silent prayer of thanks for John's distraction, since it kept him from looking at the computer screen. Turning John's attempts to be a good roommate into the source of passionate lovemaking for Lord John and Christina probably wasn't the smartest thing Christian had

done. At least, not from an “I still have to live with him after he reads it” standpoint. From the “thousands of people are going to read this and give me money” point of view, the idea was a winner and, well, Christian had bills to pay.

“Well, I’ll leave you to it,” John said. He thumped Christian on the shoulder and walked out with the dirty mug.

Christian slid down in his chair, legs splayed, and pressed firmly on his cock with the heel of his palm. What the hell was he getting himself into? *He’s not for you*, he told his dick.

It didn’t care.

THEY’D been living together two and a half months when John slipped a flyer for an upcoming performance of his band under Christian’s door while he was writing.

"You want me to come see you perform?" Christian asked when they sat down to dinner (pizza and wine in front of the television).

John shrugged and, for once, looked shy. "If you want," he said. "You don’t have to."

"I want to," Christian said. He turned the pamphlet over in his hands and wondered if he should tell John how flattered he was to be asked, if that would bring John’s usual confidence back.

John’s smile was so big and warm that Christian felt it heating his cheeks and ears, too.

ON THE night of the performance, Christian went down early to get a good spot on the cushioned bench against the wall near the stage. He looked around for John as another band played. Finally accepting that John wasn’t in the bar, Christian settled back to wait. The band sounded good, so he didn’t mind. John’s band came out next. Christian leaned forward, trying to see John through the haze of stage smoke that billowed forward courtesy of a small fog machine. He was about to shout that no one could see when John began to sing.

Christian closed his mouth. John had mentioned that he could sing, but not that he could *sing*. As John belted out one of his band's originals, Christian wished John had been more specific about the extent of his talent so that Christian could have better prepared himself. As the smoke cleared and John came into view, Christian amended that to also wish John had allowed Christian a preview of his "costume," which consisted of glitter pants spray-painted on and a shirt made for a ten-year old child that barely stretched across John's shoulders and made no attempt at covering his chest at all. No worries about that, though, because John had painted his nipples green. And pierced them. (When had he done that?) And rubbed oil on himself. If Christian had known these things, he would have sat at a table. Tables were much better for hiding hard-ons.

Hiding one with a bottle of Heineken and a miniature plate of nachos was more difficult, but Christian did the best he could.

He'd learned a lot about himself with John. For example, he now knew that the following things gave him erections: John making coffee, John bringing him coffee, John doing the laundry, John setting dinner on fire, John walking away while almost naked, John singing.

If Christian were a speculating man, he'd predict that John naked while singing and bringing him coffee and/or folding laundry as he put out a fire would also arouse him.

Or just John naked. Being a writer, Christian knew how to cut out the unnecessary bits.

When the set finished, John hopped off the stage and came directly to him. Christian pushed on his cock with his empty plate and mentally told it to behave.

"Did you like it?" John asked. He squeezed into the space between Christian and a random girl. Even in the bad lighting, Christian could tell that John's cheeks were flushed. He wanted to reach up and brush the sweat from John's brow, but John took care of that with a swipe of his forearm. Before Christian could regret the lost opportunity, John put an arm around him and settled back against the wall. His breathing was a little rough, probably from the rush of performing.

"It was amazing," Christian said. "I had no idea you could sing like that." He tried not to think about the heat radiating off John's arm into his neck and

shoulders or his desire to sink into it.

“Really?” John asked. “You thought so?” He looked hopeful.

“Yeah. I mean—wow. How are you just a barista?”

John grinned wider, and then his mouth was on Christian’s, hard and pleased and open. Christian opened too, wanting, but before he could take, John reeled backward and removed his arm. “I’m sorry. I’m—shit.” He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and moved farther away. “Fuck. Sorry.”

“It’s not, it’s fine, it’s—” But he was talking to no one. John had already retreated across the room. “Shit.”

The girl looked at him. “Did you say something?”

“No.” Gathering up his bottle and plate, Christian stood and dropped them into the trash. John had suggested separate cars that morning since he had to arrive early to help set up. Looked like those separate rides would come in handy on the way home, too. John stood at the bar talking to a few people. From the distance, Christian couldn’t tell if they were friends or new fans. He waited to see if John would look in his direction, but when John moved it was only to turn away more.

When Christian stepped outside, the chilled ocean air smacked him in the face. He closed his eyes, thinking that it was about time *someone* smacked him. Might as well be God.

He stopped in the bathroom when he got home and tried to see the back of his neck in the mirror to ascertain how many fingernails’ worth of glitter he needed to scrape off from John’s arm lying on him. He hoped John wasn’t so mortified about kissing him that he wouldn’t give him tips for getting glitter off his skin. His bed would be ruined. It could be *years* before he was glitter free. It wouldn’t be so bad, except he wasn’t a glittery guy, and now he was going to associate glitter with John looking horrified.

Christian gave his neck a swipe with a damp washcloth and dropped it on the floor with his shirt as he headed back to his room. He got into bed and pulled the laptop in with him. At least the night had inspired another adventure for Lord John.

“You don’t have to do this,” Loring said. “I can kill them all.” He strained against the bonds that lashed him to the dank stone at the front of the great hall. He glared at the row of nobles who stared impassively back at him.

Christina brushed her petite hand over his grizzled whiskers. He turned toward her touch like a lion tamed, though his eyes remained alert and feral. “I will soothe them,” she promised, “and there will be no need for killing.” Her hand trailed down his bared torso, tracking through the dark, sweat-pressed curls to cup his leather-clad bulge. “You must trust me.” She squeezed him with confidence, her eyes on his, and turned to face their captors.

“I will sing for you,” she said, her voice steady and defiant, “exactly as you wish.”

Standing before them, Christina began her song, the song that held secrets, the song that had led them here, the song that was currently the only thing keeping her and Lord John alive because only she knew it. Surely Christina understood this. These men were not going to thank them for the concert and release them. Loring struggled, his muscles like fire as he reached for futile freedom.

“Don’t.” He did not mean for it to come out sounding like a plea. Was this what he was reduced to now? What she had done to him? “I have killed five hundred men,” he bellowed, but this also sounded like desperation and not the proof of his virility that he wished it to be. No one responded or even looked at him.

Christina’s voice lifted to the heights of the Gothic arches, carrying the Latin words with it. Loring stared out at the greedy faces of the nobles as they bent over ancient maps, tracing out the path that Christina revealed with her family’s song. His cock throbbed, though he fought against it. She was hypnotic, irresistible. He tried to keep his mind focused on freeing himself so that he could save them both, but the more she sang, the more he knew that their fates were sealed and there was nothing he could do about it.

Christian shoved the laptop over to the chair. He hadn’t heard John come home. He tried to sleep anyway. After an hour of listening to the house’s noises, he fell into a fitful sleep.

Christian stood fidgeting on the stage. He stared at the crowd of people

holding their drinks and looking at him with expectation. What was he supposed to be doing? Surely not singing. These people couldn't expect him to...

He was naked. He moved to cover himself, but suddenly there was someone behind him drawing him backward by the shoulders to stand against a strong chest. A firm, confident arm slid around his waist.

"Trust me," John said.

Christian found himself nodding and pushing backward as John's erection prodded the small of his back. He sighed and let his legs fall open when John grabbed his cock and stroked.

"Don't do anything. Just feel."

Christian crumbled into him, neck arched to expose more skin for John to mouth over with delicious nibbles as his hips rocked Christian forward into his hand.

"John. John. God. Touch. God." His eyes closed. He sank down until there was nothing but he and John. John touching him, licking and kissing him, his hand slick and smooth on Christian's cock.

When he came, it was like awakening. His eyes flew open and his heart pounded as he cried John's name.

And then he was awake. In bed. And staring at John. The actual John, who was sitting next to him with Christian's laptop. John, for his part, stared right back at Christian.

"Morning," John said. He sounded stunned, as if he were just as surprised to be in the room as Christian was to see him.

"Um," Christian said. John arched an eyebrow, as if to say he expected more eloquence from a writer. Christian ignored it. The running joke in his family was that if he wrote anything before ten a.m., all his characters would be monosyllabic. He scooted backward so he could sit up, sticking his hand beneath the blanket to check. Sure enough, his pajamas were damp. Shit. He'd had a wet dream about John while John sat beside him. Breathing deeply, he forced himself to stop panicking. Why was he getting defensive? John was the one in his room. "What are you doing in here?" Christian put some fire into his voice.

Maybe John would get the hint and clear out so he could wallow in his embarrassment *alone*.

John's stare seemed to get more intense. He gestured to the laptop. "I... spilled tea on mine, and I needed to check my e-mail and—"

Christian sat up, intent. "That's not an excuse. It's the middle of the night, and you don't just use someone's laptop without asking, and you were *sitting on my bed*."

"It's almost noon," John said. He sounded snappish. "And I'm *sorry*. I was going to wake you up, but you said my *name*, so I stayed to see what else you were going to say. And then I just—when you—" He gestured at Christian's lap. Christian pulled his legs up beneath the blanket. "I read your book, okay? I didn't come in here intending to, but it was already up when I opened the computer. I was going to close it, but after you kissed me last night, and now saying my name... I had to know."

"Had to know what?" Christian felt cold all over. John wasn't supposed to find out like this. He'd leave now and then what was Christian supposed to do? If John could pretend nothing happened, it would be fine. Christian could go back to having a secret crush on John, to jerking off thinking about him, and John could go back to being his oblivious muse. Win-win.

"Christian."

"What?" Christian tugged the blanket up farther and shifted around, trying to wipe himself off in his pajamas without being obvious about it.

"Were you dreaming about Lord John Loring or about me?"

"I..." He froze with no idea what to do. "It's not uncommon for a writer to dream about his characters," he said, making a last-ditch attempt to dig himself out.

"Christian, this is us." John poked the laptop. "You're writing us."

Christian folded his arms over himself. It was a poor substitution for the hug and words of reassurance he needed at the moment. *Hey, you're not nuts, this is fine*. That sort of thing. This was not supposed to happen. He looked over at John, and hoped John recognized how much effort meeting his eyes took. "I'm sorry. Look, I'll change it if you want. I know you were just being yourself, and I

went and twisted everything around into something you never intended and... I'm sorry."

John looked back at him for a few seconds. Christian watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed. "Who said I didn't intend it?" John asked. He was quiet, as if talking was just as much a task for him as making eye contact was for Christian.

"What?" Christian asked.

"I meant it," John said.

Christian registered the words, but the bindings of fear and dread wrapped around him didn't loosen until John set the laptop down and scooted closer onto the bed beside him. When John pulled him into his arms, Christian's body went easily, although his mind struggled to understand.

John held him close and petted his hair. Gradually, Christian laid his hand on John's stomach to make sure that John was there.

John lifted Christian's chin with his finger and kissed him. Christian stretched up to reach it, taking his chance to respond as he hadn't been able to the night before. The fear that he had lost John fell away. He fisted John's shirt to keep him close. He wouldn't let go again.

John laughed against his mouth. "I thought writers were supposed to be great observers of human nature."

Christian tucked his head down and rubbed John's chest over his T-shirt. "Yeah, with me that's mostly not true." He looked up, baring whatever embarrassed expression he wore for John to see. "I, um, only 'observe' human nature as it occurs to the people I'm making up."

John pulled him forward by the arms and laid a gentle kiss on his mouth. "You aren't making me up."

Christian stretched across John's legs, letting his palm "accidentally" brush John's cock. It twitched, warm and ready through the light cotton trousers. "So you actually were trying to seduce me? With the bad cooking, calls to the fire department, using me as a guinea pig to test your new coffee flavors, and giving me erections in public?"

“And walking around soaking wet in a towel. Don’t forget that.” John grabbed Christian's hand as Christian started to remove it and kept it in place. Christian curled his fingers around John’s cock, squeezing it through the fabric.

“Can’t,” Christian said. John had repeated that one several times.

“Good. So, are you all right with that? Because I can try a little harder. I mean, if you need more material for your book.” His hips thrust upward, pushing his cock into Christian’s hand.

“I think I might need a little more,” Christian said.

“I was hoping you’d say that.” John moved then, not thrusting anymore but getting up and rolling forward, taking Christian with him until Christian was on his back and somehow they both had their pants off and John’s fingers were slick inside him, and John's mouth and glitter were *everywhere*.

“Will you take my weapon, you lovely boy?” John asked. He hovered over Christian, holding Christian’s legs up with his shoulders, and grinned wickedly down at him.

“I’m changing that line,” Christian said.

“Don’t you dare. And was that a ‘yes’?”

“Yes,” Christian said, wrapping his arms around John’s neck and pulling him down. John pushed inside him slow and steady, only stopping once, but there was no getting used to the stretch, not when Christian wanted it so much, to feel John inside him, with him, finally. He’d have to remember this for his next chapter when Christina rescued Lord John.

John kissed his ear, startling Christian out of the space where he had drifted. “Write your book later. Stay with me now.”

Turning toward him, Christian kissed him back. “Okay.” He felt overwhelmed with happiness, as if there were too much of it to stay safely inside him, so he held tight to John with his arms and legs and released it in laughter and gasps and noises that he couldn’t identify.

“CHRISTIAN, I’m not trying to critique your novel or anything, but you do realize it’s obvious you’re writing two guys, right?”

Christian pushed himself off John's chest so he could get to a proper angle for indignant staring. "What? No. Christina's a girl. I described her dress in detail."

John did not look cowed. Or any less amused. "You don't mention her breasts, though. And frankly, your description of her other girl parts could just as easily work for an asshole, as could the sex. Fingering first?"

"It's called foreplay." Christian lay back down, but he did it with added *oomph* to get his point across that even though he was open to cuddling, he still thought John was full of shit. Even if he was, possibly, right.

"Yeah. Funny that the only foreplay you mention is the one that's pretty much essential for gay sex. No one's going to believe she's a girl. That's all I'm saying."

"Well, who asked you?"

John laughed and rubbed Christian's arm.

"At least help me think about adjectives for breasts," Christian said, muffling the request into John's side.

"I know tons," John said. "You'd be surprised."

Christian bet that he would. First, though, he had something else to do. He rolled over and reached for his laptop.

"What are you doing?"

"Writing Cindy." He tugged John down so he could kiss his cheek. "She told me to write when I was ready for someone real. I'm going to tell her I am."

"Are you going to tell her you fell for the real Lord John? You'd better send a picture if you do that or else she'll call the mental institution on you."

Christian looked at John. His hair was mussed, and his eyes twinkled with good humor. "I'll risk it," he said. "I want you to myself for now. And anyway, I wouldn't want to begrudge you the chance to come to my rescue."

"I can always accidentally set something on fire," John said agreeably.

"Exactly." Christian pulled him down for a brief kiss that turned into a long

one when John rolled on top of him. Christian wrapped his arms and legs around him. The letter could wait.

RYAN LOVELESS is the half-pseudonym of a farmer's daughter. She has a B.A. in English from a private college in Illinois and is pursuing her master's degree in library and information science with an archival certificate from a university in New York. Raised in a conservative family, she was shocked and relieved when her coming out was largely uneventful, at least compared to some. She has been writing since she could read and has always drifted toward M/M because she enjoyed the relationship dynamics between men, even before she understood what sexuality was. It's possible that her first story was about G.I. Joe. She really wishes she still had that story.

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